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ABSTRACT

This brief highlights some of the most significant changes mandated by the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act of 1990 and identifies concerns that may compromise success in reaching these goals. The paper first identifies the significant changes created by the legislation, such as the replacement of set-asides with stronger assurances, the channeling of funds to districts with the highest concentrations of low-income families and to large programs, integration of academic and vocational education, and measures increasing accountability for outcomes. Concerns include inadequate appropriations and loopholes that may lead to some relaxing of efforts to serve special populations. The paper concludes that the changes in the quality and scope of vocational education called for in the new Perkins Act present unprecedented challenges and opportunities for the vocational education establishment. (7 references) (KC)

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TASPP BRIEF

Technical Assistance for Special Populations Program

Volume 3 Number 1

THE 1990 PERKINS AMENDMENTS: NO MORE "BUSINESS AS USUAL"

by Maureen Coyle-Williams

> *It is the purpose of this Act to make the United States more competitive in the world economy by developing more fully the academic and occupational skills of all segments of the population. This purpose will principally be achieved through concentrating resources on improving educational programs leading to academic and occupational skill competencies needed to work in a technologically advanced society.* (P.L. 101-392, section 2)

Significant changes in the Nation's 110,000 public and private schools are called for in the President's plan to reform American education over the next nine years (U.S. Department of Education, 1991). The Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-392) is among the many initiatives channeling federal money into this renewed reform effort (White House, 1991). The reauthorized Perkins directs vocational educators to achieve tremendous changes in the next four years. Time is short, the task is great, and the costs of failure are high. America cannot afford another failed round of educational reforms. Vocational education cannot afford to ignore the intent of Congress in the new Perkins. Future support may hinge on the field's ability to respond to its challenges. This BRIEF highlights some of the most significant changes in the new Perkins legislation and identifies concerns which may compromise success in reaching these goals.

Significant Changes in the Legislation

Through the 1990 Perkins amendments, Congress directs vocational education to achieve the following goals:

- *increase* the participation of special populations in vocational programs;
- *improve* the quality of vocational programs in schools with the greatest need for improvement;
- significantly *raise* the educational achievement of average and below-average students, including students in special populations; and
- *ensure* that all vocational education graduates are equipped with skills that are necessary for employment.

The 1990 Perkins redirects educational reform efforts by targeting the non-college bound as well as the college bound. By targeting special populations, the law responds to the needs of the increasingly diverse populations in today's classrooms. In order to reach these groups more effectively, the new law replaces the set-asides mandated by the previous legislation with even stronger assurances and guarantees.

Set-Asides Replaced with Stronger Assurances

- Each state must provide assurances that special populations are being given "equal access" to all vocational programs and activities (section 118).
- Local recipients must describe in their grant applications how they plan to meet the needs of members of special populations and how they will provide access to quality programs (section 240).
- Each local basic state grant recipient must give priority to sites or programs that serve the highest concentrations of students from special populations (section 235 b).

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Funds Channeled to Districts with the Highest Concentrations of Low-Income Families and to Large Programs

The Act further promotes high quality vocational programming for special populations by concentrating federal funds on large programs serving special populations (sections 231, 232). It specifically requires that basic state grant funds be used "to provide vocational education programs that are of such size, scope, and quality as to be effective" (section 235). The prioritization of low-income families and large programs will result in a greater concentration of funding in fewer districts, such as poor urban areas. The concentration of funds on fewer schools provides them with the necessary resources to accomplish major improvements.

DEFINITIONS OF SPECIAL AND DISADVANTAGED POPULATIONS IN THE CARL D. PERKINS VOCATIONAL AND APPLIED TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION ACT OF 1990 (P.L. 101-392)

Special populations include:

individuals with handicaps*,

educationally and economically disadvantaged individuals (including foster children),

individuals of limited English proficiency,

individuals who participate in programs designed to eliminate sex bias, and

individuals in correctional institutions (section 521. 31).

The term **disadvantaged** refers to:

individuals (other than individuals with handicaps) who require special services and assistance to enable them to succeed in vocational education programs,

members of economically disadvantaged families,

academically disadvantaged individuals,

migrants,

individuals of limited English proficiency,

dropouts, and

potential dropouts (section 521.13).

*The 1990 Perkins does not reflect the desire of the disability community to replace the term "handicapped" with the term "disability."

Integrating Academic and Vocational Education

Changes and improvements called for in this legislation focus on increasing vocational education's potential to enhance the learning and thinking skills of *all* students (including special population students). Toward this end, requirements to integrate academic and vocational education are woven throughout the law.

- Every basic state grant program is required to integrate academic and vocational education through coherent course sequences (section 201).
- Every basic state grant program must annually evaluate its effectiveness in enhancing student achievement of basic and more advanced academic skills (section 117).
- States are explicitly encouraged to consider giving academic credit for vocational courses that integrate core academic competencies (section 516).
- Pilot programs using innovative approaches to coordinate academic and vocational learning have been authorized by this legislation to serve as models for the field (section 420).

Accountability for Outcomes

The law's focus on program improvement is further evidenced in its mandate to improve *outcomes for all* students, including special populations. In order to increase accountability for student outcomes, each state is required to develop and implement a statewide system of core

standards and measures of performance for secondary and postsecondary vocational education programs. These systems must include measures of learning and competency gains (including student progress in basic and advanced academic skill achievement) and one or more of the following measures of performance:

- competency attainment,
- job or work skill attainment or enhancement,
- retention in school or completion of secondary school or its equivalent, and
- placement into additional training or education, military service or employment (section 115).

Concerns

Inadequate Appropriation

While Congress significantly increased the funding authorization for Perkins, the vocational education budget is underfunded. The $1.6 billion authorized for FY 1991, is an increase of more than $600 million over FY 1990. Unfortunately, the federal vocational education budget appropriation for 1991 is about 63% of what Perkins allows. Several programs authorized by the Act received no funding. Appropriations for basic state grants during 1991 are 71% of authorized funding. Underfunding of the vocational education budget undermines the field's ability to meet the new legislation's mandates.

Loopholes May Lead to Some Relaxing of Efforts to Serve Special Populations

While the new legislation eliminates set-asides for special populations, the inclusion of stronger assurances reflects Congressional intent to include these individuals in vocational programs. However, ambiguities and loopholes in the language of the law may actually cause a relaxing of efforts to serve special populations (Kochhar, 1991). Special population advocates have warned that some states are not fulfilling the intent of Congress even in the earliest stages of the law's implementation (Center for Law and Education, 1991). To date, the U.S. Department of Education has found most states' three-year vocational education plans unacceptable. The Department has pointed to a widespread failure to specify how the needs of special populations will be met. Some feel that even the plans which have been approved by the Department are inadequate. Lauren Jacobs, Vocational Education Coordinator for the Center for Law and Education, has criticized the Department for approving plans which do not reflect the changes which Congress sought in the new law. Along with other special population advocates she has expressed concern that the new state plans "are going to fail all students in vocational education, not just those in special populations" ("ED Sending," 1991, p. 4). *The urge to continue "business as usual" by individuals at the local, state, and federal level could significantly limit the impact of the legislation.*

Meeting the Challenge

Changes in the quality and scope of vocational education called for in the new Perkins Act present unprecedented challenges and opportunities. Overlooked during the "Academic Excellence" movement of the 80s, vocational education now has an opportunity to prove its value for all populations. Along with this opportunity comes a challenge to achieve some specific improvements. If successful, the law will change the direction, structure, and focus of the field. Early indicators of the field's ability to achieve such large scale change are poor. These early failures are discouraging as well as damaging. The long awaited issuance of the rules and regulations for implementing the law may facilitate the process of overcoming these early failures.

> *The choice facing vocational educators is clear: to step forward and propose the rebuilding of vocational education into a vital part of the education of all students - or to remain silent on the sidelines, waiting to see what the education reform movement has in store for vocational education.* (Wirt, 1991, p. 431)

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